

## **The Subway is the New Cool**

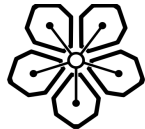
### **Japan's ODA Supporting Growth in Southeast Asia**

#### **-The Shared Future of Asia and Japan-**

The most popular hotspot now in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's largest metropolis, is Metro Line 1, the country's first subway. Since it opened on December 22, 2024, couples and families have come to pose and take commemorative photos in the subway cars or by the ticket gates, often dressed in traditional outfits called áo dài. The metro line extends 19.7 kilometers (14 stations) from Bến Thành Station, near the popular landmark Bến Thành Market in central Ho Chi Minh City, to Suối Tiên Terminal Station in the northeast. Around 2.5 kilometers of the line is underground. The subway has attracted many visitors, some from as far away as the capital Hanoi, which is over 1,100 kilometers away in direct distance.



A train of the Line 1 of the HCMC Metro passes through a residential area  
in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024. (c) AFP=時事



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In Hanoi, two elevated railways were constructed with assistance from France and China, but tourists from the capital have praised the Ho Chi Minh City subway, with one saying, “It’s a much smoother ride and the cars are clean. That’s Japanese quality for you!” Indeed, Metro Line 1, which has been so wholeheartedly welcomed by the city’s residents, was constructed using Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Japanese government made a yen loan of 196.6 billion yen to bring this national project in Vietnam to fruition.

The subway cars were manufactured by Hitachi, Ltd. at Kasado Works, located in Kudamatsu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in western Japan. Construction of the tunnel under the city, where soft ground is prevalent, was undertaken by Shimizu Corp. and Maeda Corp. Companies such as Sumitomo Corp. participated in the construction of the elevated sections of the line aboveground. Furthermore, Tokyo Metro Co., Ltd. is assisting in training drivers and establishing operation schedules. As this shows, the expertise and master craftsmanship of Japanese companies are supporting both the software and hardware aspects of this project. The skylight in Bến Thành Station, which Sumitomo Mitsui Construction Co., Ltd. helped construct, is designed to represent Vietnam’s national flower, a lotus.

At the opening ceremony, Nguyen Minh Vu, the Permanent Deputy Minister of Vietnam’s Foreign Affairs, commended the project and said, “This subway will enrich lives. It is a symbol of the partnership between our two countries.” Ho Chi Minh City, with its rapidly growing population, has been facing increasing issues each year, such as worsening traffic congestion, accidents, and air pollution. The opening of the subway line is expected to be key to resolving these multiple issues.

Japan joined the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific in 1954 and began providing ODA to developing countries. Around 70 years have passed since then. The government remains committed to its policy of leveraging Japanese technologies and expertise to provide assistance tailored to the needs of the recipient countries and produce win-win outcomes.

Japan concluded a yen loan agreement with Indonesia for the Patimban Port Development Project, in the east of Jakarta on the island of Java, providing 118.9 billion



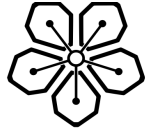
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yen in 2017 and then 70.1 billion yen in 2022. Multiple Japanese companies are taking part in the construction, including Penta-Ocean Construction Co., Ltd. and TOA Corp. The Jakarta capital region is currently struggling to expand the operating capacity of its main international port, the Port of Tanjung Priok, while also contending with traffic congestion in the area. The expansion of Patimban Port will make it the country's largest international trade hub.

In 2019, Jakarta opened Indonesia's first Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) North-South Line. This project, too, was supported by Japan, which provided a 125-billion-yen loan and technological assistance, covering everything from basic design and construction to the manufacturing of train cars and signal systems. In September 2024, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the MRT East-West Line construction project, which will utilize Japanese technologies, with Japan providing an additional loan of 140 billion yen. At the ceremony, then-President Joko Widodo said, "The completion of the North-South Line has changed the transportation network of Jakarta and Indonesia. We look forward to advancing the development of the Jakarta capital region with the construction of the East-West Line."

The average age in Indonesia is 30 years old, which makes it a "young country." It is in the midst of economic growth, with many people in their prime working years, and expected to become the fourth-largest economy in the world by 2050, surpassing Japan in gross domestic product (GDP). Java accounts for less than 10% of the country's total area, and yet is home to around 60% of the population, or 150 million people. Japan's assistance in improving the traffic congestion and air pollution issues on this extremely overpopulated island and enhancing its port capabilities will help drive Indonesia's further economic growth.

Japan's ODA is not limited to manufacturing. In the Philippines, an ongoing project is aimed at enhancing the skills of the coast guard. As an archipelagic country, the Philippines has the world's fifth-longest coastline and faces challenges such as natural disasters, maritime accidents due to aging ships, smuggling and illegal fishing. Japan provides patrol vessels and support to enhance rescue operations and improve patrol skills in an effort to aid the country's current state of having too few ships relative to the size of its maritime zone. As part of ODA, the Japan Coast Guard conducted skills enhancement training for the Philippine Coast Guard between January 20 and 31, 2025.



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It included training patrol vessel crew on skills such as towing boats and operating small ships.

Japan has carried out various ODA projects tailored to the needs of each country. For example, in Cambodia, which is striving to advance digitalization in government, projects have been implemented to improve the national data center and the digital management system of water supply facilities. In Laos, where 70% of the population works in agriculture, projects were held to improve productivity in rural areas. In Malaysia, there was a rainforest biodiversity conservation project, and assistance to develop technologies for ocean thermal energy conversion. In Thailand, a tuberculosis control project was carried out, leveraging pathogen and human genome analysis technology.

Southeast Asian countries, many with young populations, robust markets, and abundant human resources, are regarded as a global growth center. In contrast, Japan continues to struggle with an aging population and low birth rate, raising concerns about a shrinking market and declining workforce. Enhancing relations with Southeast Asia would be highly advantageous for Japan and mutually beneficial. ODA is a symbol of the bond shared between Japan and Southeast Asia.

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## Press Kit

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Passengers on a train of the Line 1 of the HCMC Metro in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024. (c) Jiji Press.

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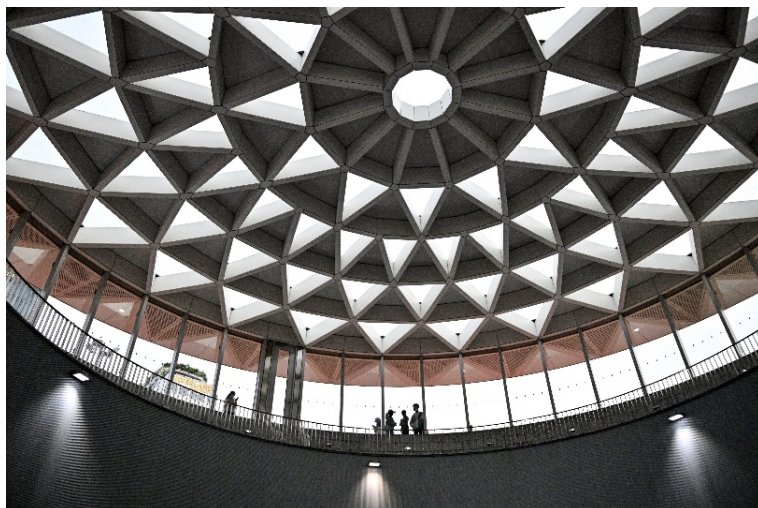
A train of the Line 1 of the HCMC Metro passes through a residential area in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024. (c) AFP=時事

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VIETNAM - TRANSPORT – METRO. (c) AFP=時事

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Ben Thanh metro station in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024. (c)AFP=時事.



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New rolling stock of Jakarta Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) on April 12, 2018. (c) Jiji Press.

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A train of the Line 1 of the HCMC Metro in Ho Chi Minh City on December 22, 2024.

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